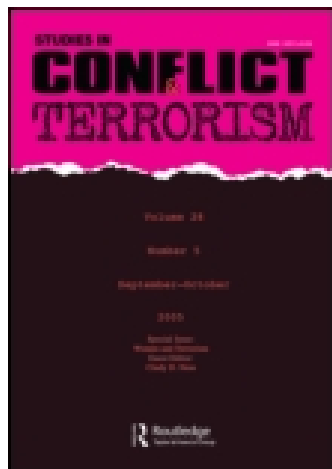


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### Live to Win Another Day: Why Many Militant Organizations Survive Yet Few Succeed

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## Live to Win Another Day: Why Many Militant Organizations Survive Yet Few Succeed

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*Militant organizations pursue two common aims: to survive and to achieve the goals that define their raison d'être. Yet, elements that sustain the life spans of militant organizations are not necessarily the same components that advance the accomplishment of their core, or "outcome," goals. Further, some organizational practices, such as the use of suicide attacks, generate a tradeoff that bolsters survivability while detracting from the effective pursuit of outcome goals. This study demonstrates that three operating conditions explain variation in the duration and achievement of contemporary militant organizations: receptiveness to tradeoffs, levels of external support, and the nature of adversaries. As such, the unique effects of different operating conditions reveal why many militant organizations survive for long periods of time but only a few achieve the goals that justify their existence.*

Militant organizations pursue two common and distinct aims: to survive and to achieve the goals that define their *raison d'être*.<sup>1</sup> Survival simply marks the length of time that a given militant organization remains in existence. Although many militant organizations survive for long periods of time, carry out numerous attacks, or even accomplish various tactical or symbolic feats, only a few organizations succeed in achieving the goals that spawned and justify their existence. The achievement of such "outcome" goals as national self-determination, territorial secession, overthrowing or replacing a government, precipitating system collapse, erecting a religious empire, stymieing a revolutionary movement, or instituting vast social or economic reforms occurs in a small minority of cases.<sup>2</sup>

The duration of a militant organization's life span tends to have little direct impact on its likelihood of achieving success.<sup>3</sup> Many organizations survive for lengthy periods of time without achieving their outcome goals. While the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) has lasted for 148 years, it has continued to fail in instituting the social changes that would meet its objectives of White nationalism and supremacy. In contrast, some militant organizations eventually achieve success decades after their establishment. Emerging in 1912, and adopting violence in 1961, the African National Congress (ANC) did not fully accomplish its outcome goal of replacing the South African government until 1994. Other militant organizations achieve success rapidly then disappear. The vigilante organization Los Pepes

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in Colombia emerged, accomplished its outcome goal of dismantling a drug cartel, and disbanded within roughly a year. Lastly, many militant organizations—with grandiose and modest outcome goals alike—fail to ever get off the ground, survive for only short periods of time, and do not achieve any degree of success. Year after year, an assortment of Greek anarchist organizations with brash aims of collapsing the “system,” just as a variety of ethnic and identity-based organizations in India seeking limited autonomy, emerge and disappear without garnering much attention or making any headway.

In contexts of asymmetric conflict, survival makes for a much simpler task than success.<sup>4</sup> As such, the elements that sustain the life spans of militant organizations are not necessarily the same components that advance the achievement of their outcome goals. Survival entails building and preserving constituent support and mobilization,<sup>5</sup> collecting and consuming intelligence,<sup>6</sup> and evading enemy countermeasures.<sup>7</sup> Defeating opponents often requires mobilizing supporters at a higher level than that needed to survive, and/or gaining significant external support from fellow militant organizations, state sponsors, or other international actors. Ultimately, successfully reaching desired outcomes involves the added ability to overcome adversarial advantage in resources,<sup>8</sup> exhaust the enemy, reduce its resolve and stimulate concessions,<sup>9</sup> eliminate the adversary altogether,<sup>10</sup> or outlast the enemy.

Crucially, with certain organizational practices, “[militant organizations face] a tradeoff between efficiency and resilience.”<sup>11</sup> Tradeoffs can emerge between “mobilizing supporters . . . [and] achieving change in targets. Dilemmas occur in the choice of tactics, since what may achieve one aim may conflict with behavior aimed at achieving another.”<sup>12</sup> As constituent and external support affects their resilience acutely, organizations try to represent the aims of their supporters,<sup>13</sup> and conduct the quantity and type of violence that aligns with their preferences.<sup>14</sup> Yet, some militant practices produce tradeoffs by bolstering constituent or external support though simultaneously emboldening the enemy’s political resolve and inviting intensified military responses. Exposing this paradox, the use of tactics such as suicide attacks strengthens the efforts of an employing organization at the support-mobilization (survival) level but detracts from its efforts at the opponent-coercion (success) level.<sup>15</sup> Considering the disadvantages militant organizations face in asymmetric conflicts vis-à-vis adversaries and the costs constituents or external supporters exact in exchange for allegiance or alliance, militant success remains difficult to achieve.

This study looks to isolate the factors of political violence that matter the most in revealing generalizable, albeit narrow, pathways to militant success. Traditional categories of militant organizations have in many cases failed to capture the real-world differences between organizations and consequently have fallen short in explaining variation in militant duration and outcomes. Political organizations that use violence, or *militant organizations*, regularly employ a variety of tactical and targeting practices, defying the traditional categories assigned to them (i.e., terrorist, insurgent, rebel, etc.). For example, throughout the mid-2000s, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) targeted U.S. and coalition forces, warranting classification as an “insurgent” organization; AQI also attacked the Iraqi government on a consistent basis, thereby falling within the category of a “rebel” organization; further, AQI most frequently targeted Iraqi civilians, fitting the label of a “terrorist” organization.<sup>16</sup> To overcome selection biases that derive from arbitrary categories,<sup>17</sup> I have constructed an original dataset of 310 militant organizations, many of which utilize a multitude of tactics and strike various target types. The dataset documents the attributes of militant organizations, their adversaries, and the network of alliances that organizations maintain with fellow militant organizations and state sponsors.

This article proceeds with five sections. The first section elaborates on the theoretical outlook of the separate militant enterprises of survival and the pursuit of outcome goals,

and outlines the expected effects of common militant *operating conditions*, and especially those related to the nature of adversaries, levels of external support, and organizational tradeoff practices. The second section introduces the research design, which describes the data, explains the coding, and defines the variables used in the empirical models. The third section presents the empirical results, demonstrating that organizations that make diverse alliances last longer and are more successful than isolated organizations. Whereas ties to fellow militants greatly increase organizational longevity, state sponsorship plays a major role in assisting militant organizations with achieving outcome goals. Organizations that fight state adversaries and specifically those with greater levels of political development have shorter durations and are less likely to achieve outcome goals than organizations that take on non-democratic states or non-state actors. Producing an explicit tradeoff effect, the organizational use of suicide attacks paradoxically fosters survivability while detracting from outcome goal achievement. The unique effects of different operating conditions elucidates why some militant organizations endure or succeed in achieving their goals when seemingly similar organizations go defunct or continue to founder. The fourth section places the findings in the context of four case examples of militant success. The final section discusses the study's implications.

### Explaining Militant Outcomes

Militant campaigns normally begin with an unequal, asymmetric, playing field, leaving militant organizations with unfavorable odds of successfully reaching their outcome goals. The logic put forth in much of the political bargaining literature argues that even in asymmetric contexts, political violence, due to the high costs it exacts from target populations, should serve as an effective means of political coercion.<sup>18</sup> However, large-*n* empirical studies of insurgencies, civil wars, and terror campaigns reveal that militant organizations seldom achieve their outcome goals.<sup>19</sup>

When they are successful, militant organizations tend to take one of four paths: enlist significant external support in either (1) political or (2) military terms to overcome the asymmetry of conflict, (3) sidestep asymmetry by taking on a lesser enemy such as a fellow non-state actor or weak state, or (4) focus on organizational survival and wait for exogenous factors (e.g., third-party intervention) to eliminate the adversary. Accordingly, adversary types, levels of external support, and receptiveness to tradeoffs that favor survivability are essential to understanding why many militant organizations endure for decades yet only a small fraction succeed in accomplishing their defining goals.

### The Nature of Adversaries

By setting the degree of asymmetry and susceptibility to coercion or outright defeat, certain adversary types diminish militant prospects for survival and success more than others. State adversaries “ordinarily” outmatch militant organizations in terms of military capability, making their efforts an uphill battle.<sup>20</sup> Along these lines, democratic states appear more successful against militant organizations. Democratic states have greater audience costs,<sup>21</sup> and as a result are less likely to bend to coercive acts and make concessions to militant organizations. Throughout the ages, Western (and generally democratic) states have waged more efficient and brutal warfare against their enemies.<sup>22</sup> As “liberal intolerance for civilian losses creates high motivation to fight [violent organizations],” states with elevated levels of political development pose steep challenges to non-state opponents.<sup>23</sup> In the latter half of the twentieth century, European democracies proved particularly resilient against the actions

of militant organizations. Basque, Breton, Corsican and other nationalist organizations, as well as leftist revolutionary organizations like the West German Rote Armee Fraction and Italian Brigade Rosse, had high failure rates. More recently, democracies such the United States, Israel, France, and India have demonstrated resolve in staving off the campaigns of various Islamist militant organizations.

Militant organizations fair better against non-democratic, weak, or failed states. To varying degrees, Frente Polisario, the Kosovo Liberation Army, Zimbabwe African National Union, Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist, Sudan People's Liberation Army, and numerous other militant organizations have achieved their outcome goals against autocratic adversaries. In armed conflicts, many potential supporters or opponents often "[sit] on the fence until it [is] clear which side [is] likely to win,"<sup>24</sup> making perception of power as important as real capacity. Therefore, convincing potential supporters and target populations alike of "inevitable victory" remains a central strategy for most militant organizations.<sup>25</sup> By carrying out attacks against a supposedly indomitable target, forcing the target to increase repression or for that matter do anything that diminishes its support, militant organizations work to expose the target as a paper tiger, which can spur the otherwise passive masses to rethink complacency or regime loyalty. For example, in 1979, the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) toppled and replaced Nicaragua's autocratic and enfeebled Somoza government. After losing U.S. military assistance a year earlier and facing popular rebuke since increasing censorship and repression, the Somoza government lay in a weakened state.<sup>26</sup> Following the spread of unrest to a number of cities, the FSLN united its factions and together with other anti-Somoza elements launched a revolutionary campaign, which a few months later achieved the outcome goal of toppling and replacing the regime.<sup>27</sup> Operating from beyond the institutional bounds of majoritarian and consensual legitimacy that democracy imparts (even in moments of widely unpopular executives) leaves autocratic regimes especially vulnerable to militant organizations rousing the masses and disrupting and altering the status quo.

Militant organizations also fair better against fellow non-state actors. In the fight for Northern Ireland, Protestant-loyalist organizations effectively pushed back against the efforts of Catholic-republican organizations, drawing them into a stalemate and preserving Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom. Similarly, in El Salvador, Alianza Republicana Nacionalista helped stymie the revolutionary aims of Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional. Relative militant success against non-state actors extends to unorganized individuals as well. During the first Palestinian *intifada* (uprising), the Palestinian Black Panthers set out to dismantle Israel's network of informants in the West Bank and Gaza. Within a few years, the organization murdered hundreds of individuals deemed *jawasis* (spies) or "collaborators," disrupted Israel's human intelligence (HUMINT) capabilities, and discouraged the next generation of Palestinians from working as informants.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, while militants have a greater likelihood of achieving success against non-democracies and non-state actors, most acts of contemporary political violence occur between militant organizations and democratic states.<sup>29</sup> As such, the dynamics of non-state political violence usually revolve around the asymmetry of conflict and organizational attempts to overcome related disadvantages.

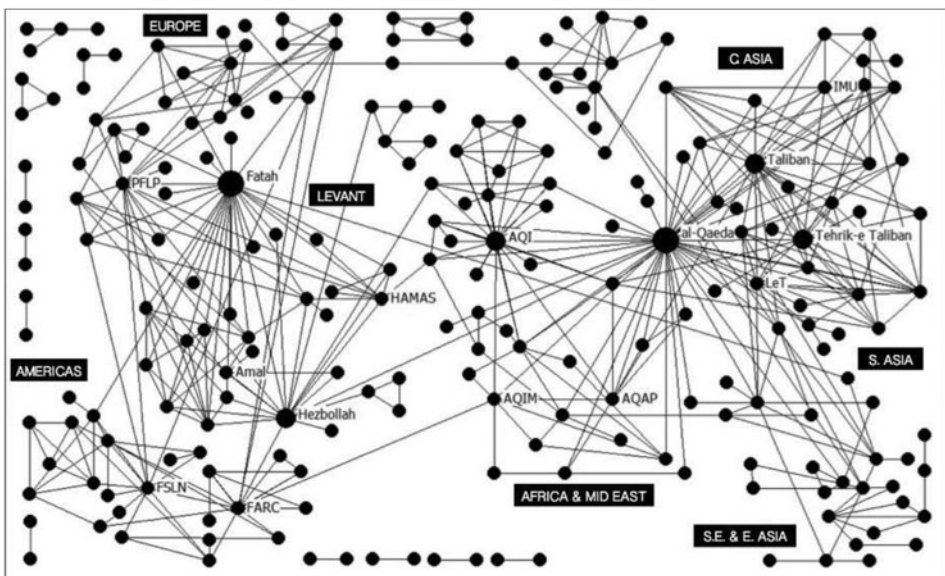
### ***The Role of External Support***

Militant organizations engaged in asymmetric conflict often rely on external support to make up for inherent disadvantages.<sup>30</sup> Historically, state sponsors have provided militant organizations with weapons, training, intelligence, financial considerations, and sanctuary.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, state sponsors can assist organizations in accomplishing their outcome goals. Many state sponsors have the ability to lend much needed international diplomatic cover, credibility, and political support. To varying degrees, states have the standing to legitimize militant organizations within the international community.<sup>32</sup> States also apply political pressure on militant adversaries or fight alongside militants in their efforts, both of which may reduce or remove the asymmetry of conflict and boost the likelihood of militant organizations achieving success. In late 2001, U.S. forces fighting in support of the Afghan Northern Alliance eliminated the asymmetry it faced in the previous five years against the Taliban-controlled Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

In a similar manner as states, organizations supply a variety of resources to fellow militants. The level of connections, or “network ties,” an organization maintains to other militant organizations directly affects its violent activity, if not its military capacity.<sup>33</sup> Network ties increase a militant organization’s attack lethality<sup>34</sup> and durability.<sup>35</sup> Latin-American revolutionary organizations have, in times of duress, defended one another, as in the case of the Batallón de las Américas in the mid-1980s, which included the Peruvian Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru, the Ecuadoran ¡Alfaro Vive, Carajo!, and the Colombian Movimiento-19 de Abril.<sup>36</sup> White-supremacist militant organizations in the United States, like the KKK and Aryan Nations, have relied on each other for shared training facilities, recruitment forums, propaganda dissemination, arms procurement, and sources of finance.<sup>37</sup> Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad received logistical and ideological lessons on deploying suicide bombers from Hezbollah.<sup>38</sup>

Figure 1 shows the last three decades of network ties between militant organizations, and illuminates the dense interconnectivity of organizations engaged in various types of political violence (i.e., terrorism, guerrilla warfare, insurgency, rebellion, vigilantism, etc.), as well as in domestic and transnational contexts. Establishing a multitude of connections, network hubs such as Al Qaeda, AQI, Fatah, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), Lashkar-e Taiba (LeT), the Taliban, Tehrik-e Taliban, and others reach a high



**Figure 1.** Global Network of Militant Organizations (1980–2012).<sup>39</sup>

degree of durability. With diverse and rich experiences and a wide-range of resources, the expertise and assets that fellow militant organizations provide include items unavailable from state sponsors.

### *Organizational Receptiveness to Tradeoffs: The Prevalent Case of Suicide Attacks*

Unfortunately for militant organizations, some means of securing support and ensuring survival diminish the effective pursuit of outcome goals. Where survival focuses organizational attention on supporters, advancing outcome goals fixates organizations on altering the adversary's position either through coercion or brute force. As Putnam observes, two-level games produce "paradoxical facts," wherein a particular "arrangement" presents a tradeoff—strengthening "decision-makers at home [yet weakening] their international bargaining positions. . ."<sup>40</sup> The two audiences that militants consistently engage potentially tug organizational aims in opposing directions.

To showcase the sometimes-oppositional endeavors of survival and success, this article illustrates the case of suicide attacks.<sup>41</sup> In some respect, the *zeitgeist* of the current era of political violence stems from the advent and increasing prevalence of the suicide bomber. By the end of 2012, 102 militant organizations had carried out suicide attacks; and of the 151 militant organizations operative, 61 (40.4 percent) had at one point in their existence conducted suicide attacks.

Since the first contemporary martyrdom operation in 1980,<sup>42</sup> suicide attacks have become an integral component of many militant organizations' support structure. Suicide attacks offer an array of tactical advantages for employing organizations, but more importantly the *modus operandi* primarily serves as a means to engender and mobilize constituent or external support.<sup>43</sup> Launching suicide attacks can signal determination to a constituency or potential allies, and subsequently result in "swelling the support" of the employing organization.<sup>44</sup> Some constituencies maintain substantial support for martyrdom operations/suicide attacks, and accordingly their use functions as "a method of recruitment" and a way to "give legitimacy" to sponsoring organizations.<sup>45</sup> As they better represent the wishes of supporters by carrying out suicide attacks, organizations are expected to bolster their survivability as a result.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to domestic contexts, conducting martyrdom operations works as a form of solicitation in efforts to obtain outside support from like-minded militants.<sup>47</sup> Militant organizations identify potential allies along ideological or religious similitudes,<sup>48</sup> and subsequently implement methods that boost notoriety and show dedication to a collective, inter-organizational, cause.<sup>49</sup> In this regard, the use of suicide attacks signals solidarity and helps militants foster ties to well-established organizations. On top of opening up channels of resources, gaining new allies can also globalize or regionalize specific conflicts, potentially expanding the scope of an organization's constituency and support structure.

Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad—the forerunner organization to AQI—exemplifies this process. Founded in 1999 by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, al-Tawhid wal-Jihad carried out numerous conventional attacks during its early years of operation, including the assassination of a U.S. diplomat in Jordan. Yet, the organization did not begin to make a name for itself until June of 2003 when it launched its first suicide attack amid the opening months of the Iraq War. The adoption and widespread employment of suicide attacks placed al-Zarqawi and his organization at the forefront of a *jihadi* insurgency against U.S. and coalition forces.<sup>50</sup> Over the next few years, al-Tawhid wal-Jihad carried out 90 suicide attacks, earned the support of Osama bin Laden, recruited *mujahedin* (holy warriors) from across the Islamic

world, and transformed into the official Al Qaeda franchise in Iraq. In a short period of time, al-Tawhid wal-Jihad grew from an isolated and inconsequential organization into a highly connected and durable Al Qaeda branch that came to represent the core of the Iraqi insurgency.<sup>51</sup>

Ultimately, conducting suicide attacks might increase organizational durability and provide some short-term victories, but the effect of employing the modus operandi on prospects for achieving outcome goals appears less promising.<sup>52</sup> While al-Tawhid wal-Jihad's suicide attack campaign brought it considerable and lasting outside support and triggered sectarian strife in Iraq in the mid-2000s as intended, its successor organization AQI has failed to accomplish its outcome goal of establishing the Islamic State of Iraq as the official Iraqi government. The organization's reputation for brutality marginalized its political effectiveness and credibility.<sup>53</sup> In 2006, the organization's extensive use of suicide attacks led a number of Sunni-Iraqi tribal leaders to form anti-Al Qaeda *Sahwah* (Awakening) Councils. Complementing the U.S. troop surge in 2007, Sahwah militias aided coalition and Iraqi forces in eradicating AQI's original al-Tawhid wal-Jihad leadership. During the 1980s, Hezbollah scored major points in the Islamic world by using suicide attacks to precipitate the withdrawal of multinational forces from Lebanon. However, outside of setting up de facto government control in Lebanon's South (which it shares with Amal),<sup>54</sup> Hezbollah has yet to institute the Iranian model of government over most of Lebanon. Kataeb, Lebanese Forces, and the Future Movement, among others in the March 14 Alliance, as well as various Sunni-Islamist organizations continue to counter Hezbollah and the March 8 Alliance electorally and otherwise. Other central employers of suicide attacks such as Hamas and Fatah have likewise achieved some success in asserting control over parts of coveted territory, though neither has come close to erecting a state over all of the territory they desire. Israel and Fatah still stand in the way of Hamas, just as Israel and Hamas stand in Fatah's way.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, organizations known distinctly for their use of suicide attacks have a noticeably dismal record of achieving outcome goals. Despite its ability to adapt and survive, Al Qaeda has not established anything reminiscent of the Caliphate. Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan has yet to exact a Kurdish homeland from Turkey. Imarate Kavkaz and precursor organizations Special Purpose Islamic Regiment (SPIR) and Riyadh as-Saliheyn Martyrs' Brigade (RSMB) have failed to coerce Russia into withdrawing from its Caucasian territories. Boko Haram remains far from turning Nigeria into an Islamist state, and Tehrik-e Taliban has more than fallen short in its struggle to overthrow the secular Pakistani government.

Employing suicide attacks may strengthen an organization's domestic or external support structure, but at the cost of emboldening enemy resolve. Intense violence, like that generated from suicide attacks, often has the effect of convincing a target population that the assaulting organization and sponsoring constituency are untrustworthy and unwilling to make or keep commitments. Consequently, the heightened distrust that the use of suicide attacks instills exacerbates credibility problems that already prolong most armed conflicts.<sup>56</sup> Abrahms terms this the "credibility paradox," recognizing that "the very escalatory acts that add credibility to a [militant organization's] threat can subtract credibility from [its] promise [to end the threatening act if the target makes concessions]."<sup>57</sup> Owing to their destructive severity and grim message that "we are willing to kill ourselves in order to kill you," suicide attacks exacerbate the credibility paradox unlike any other militant practice.<sup>58</sup> The assumption among target populations that organizations that use extreme tactics conjointly hold extreme and uncompromising positions hardens target populations against making concessions and tends to instigate more severe military responses.<sup>59</sup>

In many cases, states and populations targeted by extreme tactics such as suicide attacks react with intensified aggression.<sup>60</sup> Launching a sweeping "War on Terrorism" and



conventional wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. response to the 11 September 2001 suicide attacks demonstrates the extent a state will take to fight off “suicidal” killers. Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahedin’s persistent use of suicide attacks sparked a forceful response from the African Union. After enduring a lengthy and costly suicide attack campaign, Sri Lanka took extreme measures to eliminate the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. SPIR and RSMB’s series of suicide attacks led Russia to implement progressively harsh countermeasures in Chechnya and Dagestan. In turn, harsh military reactions can swell constituent support for militant organizations.<sup>61</sup> Yet, by making targets less likely to concede anything or pushing targets to intensify military operations against the sponsoring organization, the use of suicide attacks regularly places militants further from accomplishing their outcome goals. In some instances, the willingness to use suicide attacks equips organizations with the ability to deter, but not coerce a target into making favorable concessions.<sup>62</sup> Israel’s construction of a separation wall makes for a fitting example, as it displays Israel’s reluctance to fully engage Palestinian organizations in either military conflict or peace negotiations. Both types of spikes in target resolve (intensified military responses and deeper reluctance to engage politically) do the exact opposite of that which militants need to achieve their outcome goals, and in this respect the use of suicide attacks greatly diminishes organizational prospects for success.

At any rate, the durability in the form of augmented constituent or external support that an organization receives from using suicide attacks motivates some organizations to adopt the tactic despite its record of ineffectiveness in spawning outcome goal achievement. Among organizations that grasp the negative effects of suicide attacks (i.e., in terms of decreasing political credibility and instigating intensified military reactions), some may choose to employ the tactic anyway if they intend on outlasting or someday eliminating their adversary. Yet, in asymmetric conflicts, the use of suicide attacks amounts to “awakening the giant,” likely unleashing the military might of those targeted.

## Research Design

To uncover the key factors that advance the distinct militant aims of survival and success, I run two sets of statistical analyses. The first stage of empirical tests uses Cox proportional hazards models to analyze the life spans of militant organizations. The second stage consists of logistic (logit) regression models that test the effectiveness of militant organizations in achieving outcome goals.

### *Coding Survival and Successful Outcomes*

The empirical tests analyze two dependent variables: the *duration* and *achievement* of militant organizations. Duration (measured in years) marks the length of time a militant organization remains in existence. I code the onset of duration as either the date of an official declaration of a militant organization’s establishment or the date of its first confirmed act of political violence. The end of duration for defunct organizations is coded as the date of elimination by force or a declared date of dissolution. In asymmetric warfare, duration or *survival* itself can be a chief organizational goal, as well as a minimal measure for organizational success. Nevertheless, a political study of militant organizations requires a finer estimation of achievement than mere survival.

This study treats the achievement of an organization’s outcome goal as “success.” Outcome goals represent an organization’s *raison d’être*. They signify the purpose of an organization’s genesis and persistence. Outcome goals exhibit the revolutionary or

reactionary demands that militant organizations place on the status quo, which a particular adversary secures or promotes.<sup>63</sup> Examples of outcome goals include: the Provisional Irish Republican Army's goal of Northern Ireland's secession from the United Kingdom, Euskadi ta Askatasuna's similar objective concerning a Basque homeland independent of Spain, Al Qaeda's goal of re-establishing the Caliphate, Lashkar-e Jhangvi's goal to rid Pakistan of all Shi'a-Muslims, and the Communist Party of India-Maoist's aim of founding a "Compact Revolutionary Zone," which would designate a Naxalite state separate from Indian rule.

For robustness, I use strict and relaxed criteria for coding outcome goal achievement.<sup>64</sup> "Complete success" refers to the more stringent criterion, under which an organization reaches the entirety or near entirety of its stated outcome goal. Setting an archetype of militant achievement, the ANC reached complete success by effectively employing violence in a political balancing act that focused on acquiring the political capital necessary to build significant international support and eventually replace the ruling government. "Partial success" occurs when an organization reaches an outcome goal in a limited manner. For example, Hamas and Hezbollah fit this latter coding rubric, as they have both attained political control over sizeable sections of the territory they seek to rule. Although as noted previously, neither organization has achieved complete success by its own standards. In coding outcome failure, Sendero Luminoso makes for a perhaps surprisingly typical example. To date, Sendero Luminoso conducted more acts of political violence than any other militant organizations in the contemporary era and was fairly effective in terms of lethality. However, as it relates to achieving outcome goals, Sendero Luminoso thoroughly failed—considering the organization never successfully imposed its Maoist design on the Peruvian state.

The difference between complete success and partial success, and partial success and failure, is evident in the degree of the effected change, or absence of change, in relation to statements of intended change. Examples of the line between complete success and partial success include: sharing political power with other organizations/parties where full control is desired, gaining autonomy where full self-determination is the goal, or capturing a portion but not the entirety of a coveted territory. Similarly, the difference between partial success and failure is the absence of any newly granted autonomy, political power-sharing, or territorial seizure.

I have coded organizational success as the achievement of outcome goals for various reasons. Previous studies have shown outcome goal achievement to work as a relatively clear and unbiased point of reference for coding organizational success in statistical analyses.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, coding success along the lines of outcome goal achievement marks a useful way to understand when organizations successfully alter a target's resolve to the extent that the target relinquishes political or territorial control, or when organizations obtain enough external support to defeat their adversary outright. Other potential measures of militant effectiveness, like the quantity of attacks or levels of attack lethality, might capture the tactical efficacy of organizations yet they reveal little, if anything, about the ability of organizations to gain and utilize capacity in the cause of achieving the goals that justify and make their existence possible.

### *Data and Variables*

The dataset for this study documents the attributes, adversaries, and affiliations of 310 militant organizations active sometime between the years 1980 and 2012.<sup>66</sup> To identify organization outcome goals, durations, ideologies, adversary attributes, cases of state sponsorship,<sup>67</sup> safe havens, and construct the network of militant organizations,<sup>68</sup> I conducted extensive

**Table 1**  
Alive and successful?

	No outcome goal achieved	Outcome goal achieved	Total
Defunct	116	35	151
Alive	136	23	159
Total	252	58	310

research on each organization in the dataset using a variety of source materials. Data entries were cross-referenced with two or more sources.<sup>69</sup> The data on the number of attacks that each organization carried out was collected from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START).<sup>70</sup> For data on organization size, I cross-referenced my findings with Jones and Libicki's dataset.<sup>71</sup> In compiling the dataset, special care was taken to ensure that duplicate organizations were not included, considering militant organizations often use numerous names or claim attacks under aliases.<sup>72</sup>

In Models 1 and 2 (and 7 and 8), the life span or DURATION of militant organizations is the dependent variable. In Models 3 through 6, the binary variable of whether an organization has ACHIEVED ITS OUTCOME GOAL is the dependent variable. Independent variables include: the number of NETWORK TIES an organization has established with fellow militant organizations, the number of STATE SPONSORS an organization has maintained, the number of SAFE HAVENS an organization has accessed, the number of ATTACKS an organization has launched, the dummy variables of whether an organization subscribes to a variant of POLITICAL ISLAM, a LEFTIST ideology such as Marxism-Leninism or Maoism, whether an organization pursues the NATIONALIST goal of self-determination, the organization size variables of 1,000-PLUS MEMBERS and 10,000-PLUS MEMBERS, whether an organization conducts SUICIDE ATTACKS, and whether an organization primarily fights a STATE ENEMY. Development variables of the primary adversary include: ENEMY POLITY<sup>73</sup> and ENEMY GDP PER CAPITA.<sup>74</sup> For the logit models, the AGE variable measures the effect of duration on success.

### *Descriptive Statistics*

Table 1 displays a crosstabulation on militant survival and success. Of all 310 organizations in the sample (including those still operative), the mean survival time is 19.3 years—revealing that many militant organizations survive for long periods of time. 39 of the 310 organizations (or 12.6 percent) did not survive past a single year. 130 (or 41.9 percent) did not survive past ten years.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, success remains a difficult task for militant organizations, with only 58 of the 310 organizations (or 18.7 percent) partially or completely achieving an outcome goal. However, failure to achieve outcome goals has little bearing on an organization's survivability, attesting to the need to move beyond monocausal explanations of survival and success.

### **Empirical Results**

Table 2 reports the results of the Cox proportional hazards models. Because they offer a more intuitive interpretation of survival analyses than coefficients, I present hazard ratios.<sup>76</sup> A hazard ratio below one reflects a negative coefficient, while a hazard ratio above one

**Table 2**  
 Militant survival (Cox proportional hazards regression results)

DV = Organization duration	Model 1 hazard ratio/(rse)	Model 2 hazard ratio/(rse)	Model 7 hazard ratio/(rse)	Model 8 hazard ratio/(rse)
1,000-Plus Members	0.488*** (0.129)	0.475*** (0.129)	0.496*** (0.134)	0.475*** (0.130)
10,000-Plus Members	0.695 (0.282)	0.708 (0.289)	0.734 (0.306)	0.753 (0.305)
Political Islam	0.998 (0.246)	1.032 (0.254)	1.004 (0.246)	0.998 (0.248)
Leftist	0.752 (0.164)	0.740 (0.169)	0.726 (0.168)	0.729 (0.170)
Nationalist	0.699* (0.139)	0.686* (0.142)	0.680* (0.141)	0.680* (0.143)
Attacks	1.000 (0.0001)	1.000 (0.0001)	1.000 (0.0001)	1.000 (0.0001)
Suicide Attacks	0.600* (0.166)	0.591* (0.165)	0.562** (0.157)	0.573** (0.160)
Safe Havens	0.701 (0.171)	0.727 (0.170)	0.713 (0.168)	0.721 (0.165)
State Sponsors	0.904 (0.075)	0.910 (0.076)	0.932 (0.083)	0.933 (0.075)
Network Ties	0.885*** (0.040)	0.891** (0.041)	0.902** (0.042)	0.902** (0.042)
State Enemy	1.629* (0.424)			
Enemy Polity		1.023* (0.014)	1.018 (0.014)	1.018 (0.014)
Enemy GDP Per Capita		0.990 (0.007)	0.990 (0.007)	0.990 (0.007)
Outcome Goal Achieved (Partial)			0.670 (0.166)	
Outcome Goal Achieved (Complete)				0.616 (0.184)
Observations	310	310	310	310
Failures	159	159	159	159
Times at Risk	5972	5972	5972	5972
Wald chi <sup>2</sup>	(11) 61.61***	(12) 63.44***	(13) 65.22***	(13) 66.68***
Log pseudolikelihood	-790.013	-790.456	-789.092	-789.151
AIC	1602.026	1604.912	1599.420	1599.452

\*\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \* $p < .1$ . AIC: Aikake Information Criterion.

reflects a positive coefficient. In regard to organizational survival, a hazard ratio below the baseline of one demonstrates that a variable decreases the odds of organizations going defunct. A hazard ratio above the baseline of one signifies that a variable increases the odds of organizations going defunct.

Models 1 and 2 indicate that network ties, conducting suicide attacks, and reaching 1,000 members extend the life spans of militant organizations, whereas fighting a state enemy and especially one with a greater level of political development reduces organization duration.<sup>77</sup> The models also support the long-held contention in qualitative studies that militant organizations that pursue national self-determination last longer than organizations with other outcome goals.<sup>78</sup> Illustrating their popularity among some constituencies, the use of martyrdom operations/suicide attacks boosts the likelihood of an organization's survival by 41 percent. In the sense that the accumulative effects of multiple connections to fellow militants alone potentially skyrocket an organization's durability, network ties represent the lifeblood of organizational longevity.

Table 3 reports the results of logit models that test the effectiveness of militants in achieving outcome goals, using the same explanatory variables tested in the survival models (with the addition of AGE to account for the effect of duration).<sup>79</sup> With a relaxed coding of success, Model 3 shows that state sponsors and network ties contribute to organizations *partially* achieving their outcome goals. Fighting state enemies with higher levels of political development reduces the likelihood of militant organizations achieving their outcome goals. Paradoxically, although carrying out suicide attacks increases organizational survival, using the modus operandi decreases the chances of achieving outcome goals. In Model 4, the coding stringency for success is raised to complete or near achievement of outcome goals; the results mostly stay the same with the exception of the effects of state sponsors, which cease to significantly predict outcome goal achievement. Models 5 and 6 employ ordered logit regressions, combining the dependent variables of partial and complete success; the models yield similar results to Model 3, with the addition of 10,000-plus members significantly predicting outcome goal achievement.

Both state sponsors and network ties are positive and significant predictors of outcome goal achievement, but considering the logit models alone do not express which is more substantive, Table 4 displays marginal effects. When a militant organization has two state sponsors and zero network ties, it has a 16.67 percent probability of achieving success. This contrasts with a 10.36 percent probability of success when a militant organization has zero state sponsors and two network ties. As such, state sponsors have a greater impact on militant prospects for success than network ties.

Importantly, the results underscore the independence of the militant aims of survival and achieving outcome goals. Across Models 3 through 6, organization age has no effect on success. Further, as robustness checks, I conduct additional Cox models on the effects of OUTCOME GOAL ACHIEVEMENT on survival. Models 7 and 8 (refer back to Table 2) demonstrate that when organizations achieve success either partially or completely, it has no effect on duration.

To better evaluate how different elements advance or detract from militant survival and success, Figure 2 presents the combined findings side by side. Three operating conditions stand out: external support which is central to success as well as survival, the nature of the adversary which affects survival and particularly success, and the use of suicide attacks which produces a tradeoff effect. I review each of these components in turn.

### ***The Suicide-Attack Tradeoff***

Suicide attacks generate an explicit tradeoff in militant endeavors. By employing suicide attacks, organizations reinforce or establish new avenues of support and accordingly bolster survivability (see Figure 3). But, conducting suicide attacks exacerbates credibility

**Table 3**  
 Militant success (Logistic regression results)

DV = Achieved outcome goal	Model 3: Including partial success (Logit) coefficient/ (rse)	Model 4: Only complete success (Logit) coefficient/ (rse)	Model 5: Success (Ordered logit) coefficient/ (rse)	Model 6: Success (Ordered logit) coefficient/ (rse)
Age	0.005 (0.014)	0.001 (0.012)	0.006 (0.015)	0.007 (0.014)
1,000-Plus Members	0.693 (0.536)	0.372 (0.767)	0.845 (0.537)	0.498 (0.574)
10,000-Plus Members	0.940 (0.576)	1.069 (0.743)	1.103** (0.543)	1.214** (0.546)
Political Islam	-0.476 (0.535)	-0.159 (0.491)	-0.320 (0.506)	-0.415 (0.491)
Leftist	0.042 (0.474)	0.482 (0.482)	-0.202 (0.456)	0.109 (0.468)
Nationalist	0.006 (0.394)	0.128 (0.449)	-0.200 (0.393)	0.060 (0.385)
Attacks	-0.0003 (0.0003)	0.00001 (0.0003)	-0.0004 (0.0003)	-0.0002 (0.0003)
Suicide Attacks	-1.587** (0.673)	-2.384** (0.980)	-1.861** (0.728)	-1.833*** (0.676)
Safe Havens	-0.250 (0.348)	0.127 (0.460)	-0.082 (0.326)	-0.084 (0.349)
State Sponsors	0.580*** (0.179)	0.395 (0.282)	0.437** (0.172)	0.391** (0.192)
Network Ties	0.110* (0.057)	0.113* (0.061)	0.077 (0.051)	0.117** (0.055)
State Enemy			-1.614*** (0.458)	
Enemy Polity	-0.095*** (0.028)	-0.133*** (0.032)		-0.097*** (0.026)
Enemy GDP Per Capita	-0.008 (0.018)	-0.008 (0.030)		-0.009 (0.018)
Constant	-1.239*** (0.408)	-1.532*** (0.431)		
Cut 1			0.876 (0.462)	1.125 (0.398)
Cut 2			1.517 (0.476)	1.787 (0.429)
Observations	310	310	310	310
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.29	0.30	0.22	0.24
Wald chi <sup>2</sup>	(13) 57.43***	(13) 43.84***	(12) 51.21***	(13) 58.97***
Log pseudolikelihood	-105.808	-80.904	-144.859	-141.802
AIC	239.616	189.808	317.719	313.604

The three dependent variable outcomes in the ordered logit models are complete success, partial success, and failure to succeed.

\*\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \* $p < .1$ . AIC: Aikake Information Criterion.

**Table 4**  
Marginal effects of state sponsors and network ties

Likelihood of outcome goal achievement	13.19%	20.17%	16.67%	10.36%
State sponsors	x = 1	x = 2	x = 2	x = 0
Network ties	x = 1	x = 2	x = 0	x = 2

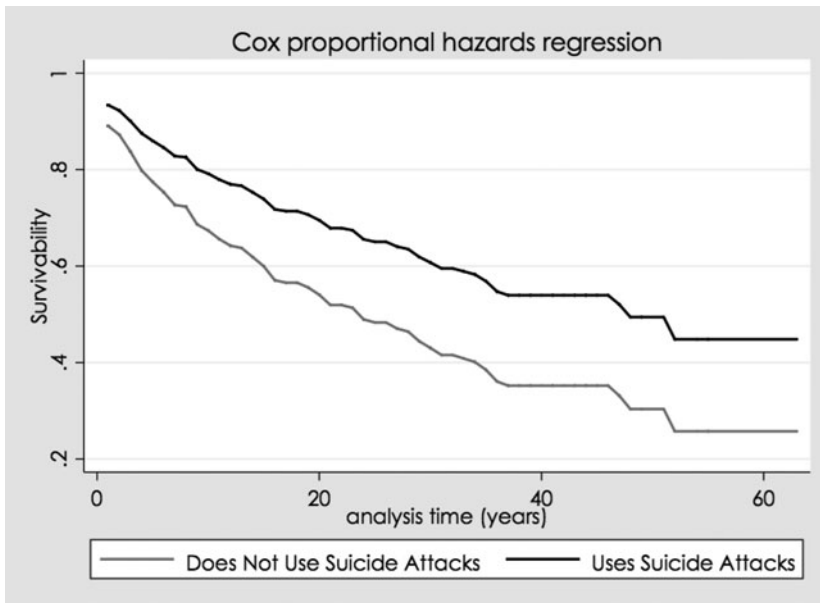
The results derive from Model 6. Probabilities are calculated holding all other independent variables at their means and dummy variables at zero. Probabilities are calculated holding dummy variables at zero and rounding up all other independent variables from their means.

deficiencies vis-à-vis targets and often induces target states to “take off the gloves” militarily. Consequently, organizations that use the *modus operandi* are less likely to achieve their outcome goals. Table 5 shows the negative relation between the employment of suicide attacks and militant achievement. Organizations that carry out suicide attacks have eight successes in a combined 1,527 organization-years, averaging the achievement of one outcome goal every 190.88 organization-years. In contrast, organizations that do not conduct suicide attacks have 50 successes in a combined 4,445 organization-years, averaging the achievement of one outcome goal every 88.9 organization-years.

By using suicide attacks, organizations demonstrate a preference for boosting constituent or external support, even if it means emboldening target resolve. Among certain constituencies, organizations might find themselves necessarily involved in this one-sided approach. Referring to Palestinian society for example, Bloom assesses: “Support for

Duration → Success ↓	Positive Effect	Negative Effect	No Significant Effect
	Positive Effect		
Positive Effect	Network Ties		State Sponsors, 10,000+ Members
Negative Effect	Suicide Attacks	Enemy Polity	
No Significant Effect	1,000+ Members, Nationalist Goal		Islamist Ideology, Leftist Ideology, Safe Havens, Number of Attacks, Enemy GDP

**Figure 2.** Significant effects on duration and achievement.



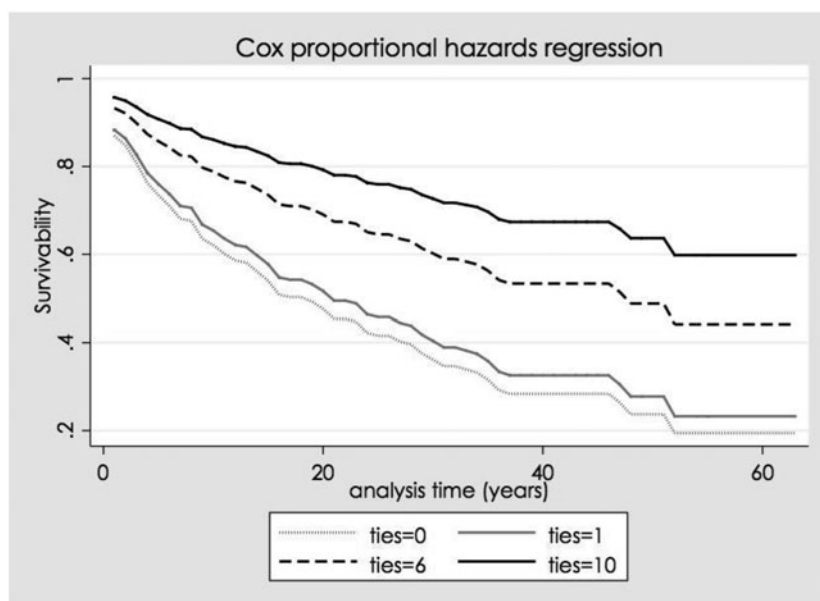
**Figure 3.** The relation between the use of suicide attacks and militant survival.

suicide [attacks] works against the stated goals of a better future for Palestinian civilians. . . . Yet, the majority of Palestinians support the continuation . . . [of] martyrdom operations regardless of Israeli retaliatory policies.”<sup>80</sup> Under such circumstances, an organization that refrained from “kicking the hornet’s nest” would quickly notice dwindling support. Notably, when the core aims of organizations come into competition, survival usually takes

**Table 5**  
The relation between the use of suicide attacks and militant success

Organization receptiveness to the suicide-attack tradeoff	Descriptive statistics	Successes		
		Partial	Complete	Combined
Does not conduct suicide attacks	228 out of 310 organizations (73.6% of all organizations) 4,445 organization-years	15	35	50
		Organizations that do not conduct suicide attacks have 50 out of 58, or 86.2%, of all militant successes		
Conducts suicide attacks	82 out of 310 organizations (26.5% of all organizations) 1,527 organization-years	5	3	8
		Organizations that conduct suicide attacks have 8 out of 58, or 13.8%, of all militant successes		





**Figure 4.** The relation between network ties and militant survival.

precedence with organizations choosing to “defer” the effective pursuit of outcome goals.<sup>81</sup> Thus, the continued adoption of suicide attacks despite the tactic’s poor record of resulting in outcome goal achievement points to militant organizations concerned primarily with survival. They would rather ensure survival and attempt to win another day.

### *External Support Structures*

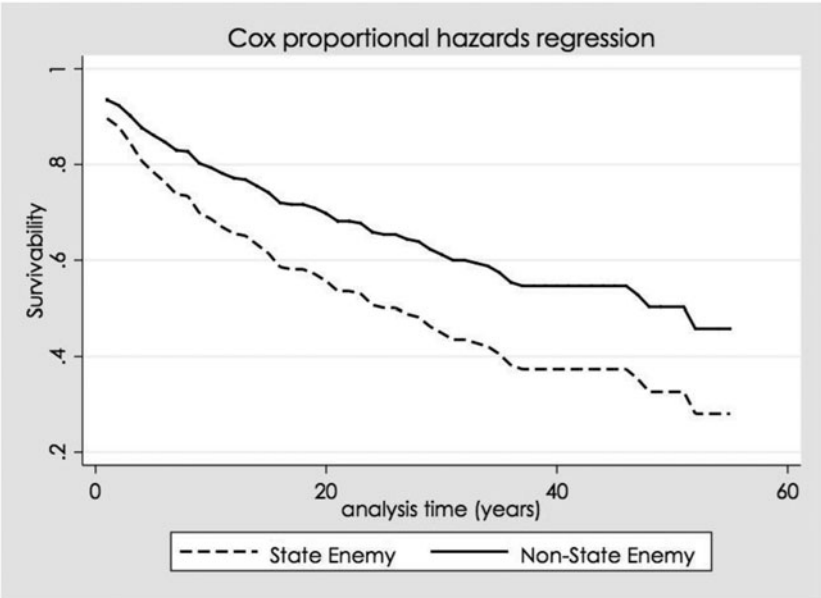
External support strengthens militant enterprises unlike any other factor. Organizations can increase their odds of survival sharply depending on the amount of connections they maintain with other militant organizations (see Figure 4). Failing to connect to other militants, “outsider” organizations remain greatly outmatched, and as a result have considerably shorter life spans. The results indicate that both state sponsors and network ties are positively associated with achieving outcome goals, highlighting the importance of making diverse and numerous allies. Although they do not directly enhance an organization’s survivability like network ties do, state sponsors increase the likelihood of outcome goal achievement more so than network ties. Table 6 displays how differences in alliance structures contribute to variation in militant success. Organizations without any state sponsors or network ties have 3 successes in a combined 412 organization-years, averaging the achievement of one outcome goal every 137.33 organization-years. Organizations with only network ties have 18 successes in a combined 2,281 organization-years, averaging the achievement of one outcome goal every 126.72 organization-years. Organizations with state sponsors and network ties have 33 successes in a combined 3,027 organization-years, averaging the achievement of one outcome goal every 91.73 organization-years. Organizations with only state sponsors have 4 successes in a combined 252 organization-years, averaging the achievement of one outcome goal every 63 organization-years.

**Table 6**  
The relation between alliance structure and militant success

Alliance structure	Descriptive statistics	Successes		
		Partial	Complete	Combined
Network ties and state sponsors	108 out of 310 organizations (34.8% of all organizations) 3,027 organization-years	10 Organizations with this alliance structure have 33 out of 58, or 56.9%, of all militant successes	23	33
Only state sponsors	13 out of 310 organizations (4.2% of all organizations) 252 organization-years	1 Organizations with this alliance structure have 4 out of 58, or 6.9%, of all militant successes	3	4
Only network ties	134 out of 310 organizations (43.2% of all organizations) 2,281 organization-years	9 Organizations with this alliance structure have 18 out of 58, or 31%, of all militant successes	9	18
No network ties or state sponsors	55 out of 310 organizations (17.7% of all organizations) 412 organization-years	2 Organizations with this alliance structure have 3 out of 58, or 5.2%, of all militant successes	1	3

*Democracies Stymie Militant Success*

Militant organizations that fight states have shorter life spans (see Figure 5) and democratic states are especially effective in curtailing militant success. Table 7 shows the relation



**Figure 5.** The relation between adversary type and militant survival.

**Table 7**  
The relation between adversary type and militant success

Adversary type	Descriptive statistics	Successes		
		Partial	Partial	Partial
Democratic state (7 or higher Polity IV score)	171 out of 310 organizations (55.2% of all organizations) 3,387 organization-years	10	9	19
		Organizations that fight democracies have 19 out of 58, or 32.8%, of all militant successes		
Non-democratic state (Lower than 7 Polity IV score)	86 out of 310 organizations (27.7% of all organizations) 1,435 organization-years	5	16	21
		Organizations that fight non-democracies have 21 out of 58, or 36.2%, of all militant successes		
Non-state actor	53 out of 310 organizations (17.1% of all organizations) 1,150 organization-years	5	13	18
		Organizations that fight non-state actors have 18 out of 58, or 31%, of all militant successes		

between the nature of adversaries and militant achievement. Organizations that fight democratic states, that is, those with high Polity scores, have 19 successes in a combined 3,387 organization-years, averaging the achievement of one outcome goal every 178.26 organization-years. Organizations that fight non-democratic states have 21 successes in a combined 1,435 organization-years, averaging the achievement of one outcome goal every 68.33 organization-years. Organizations that fight non-state actors have 18 successes in a combined 1,150 organization-years, averaging the achievement of one outcome goal every 63.89 organization-years. Even though militant organizations fight democracies more than non-democracies, militants are more successful against non-democratic states, and slightly more so against non-state actors.

### Pathways to Success

Militant organizations tend to take one of four broad pathways to success. In one pathway, an organization employs violence to gain and maintain enough constituent support to remain active against its enemy long and effective enough to force the target to seek a political solution. In a derivative of this pathway, an organization stays functional enough to keep up its fight, while accumulating international support, which leads to outside actors jockeying on the organization's behalf to negotiate or impose a political solution on the target state. Organizations take a second pathway to success by winning a decisive military victory over their enemy or ending the target regime/entity outright. A third pathway to success stems from matching limited means to limited ends, in which militants pursue a relatively quick victory against a comparable or weaker opponent that achieves a minimal charge. Militant organizations take a fourth pathway to success by focusing on survival, and simply waiting for another force to alter the status quo. This is not a war of attrition but rather a waiting

game, in which the organization builds up its internal durability and waits for a third party to defeat the shared enemy.

*Success via Politics.* Durability and the ability to accumulate external supporters and have outside pressure applied on the enemy can result in success through political avenues. The ANC makes for a prime example of achieving success via politics. Turning to violence in 1961, the ANC sought to change South Africa's regime and end apartheid. In subsequent decades, the ANC mastered a delicate political balancing act. This game involved using the level of violence necessary to sustain its constituent support and prevent mass defection to its rival, the Pan Africanist Congress, while acquiring the political capital needed to establish coercive dialogue with the ruling government, build international support and an international consensus against the policy of apartheid, and eventually transition into a legal political party and replace the regime.<sup>82</sup> Today the ANC sits in its second decade as the governing party of South Africa. All in all, the ANC refrained from adopting paradoxical tactics, secured state sponsorship, and deadened the asymmetry of the conflict and ultimately the enemy's resolve through politics.

*Success Through Military Victory.* Militant organizations also take a military path to achieving their outcome goals. This usually ensues in the context of a broader conflict with a multitude of actors. The role of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) in the 2011 Libyan revolution makes for a fitting example. In 1995, former-Libyan Mujahedin, who had fought in the Soviet-Afghanistan War, founded LIFG with the goal of overthrowing Muammar Qaddafi's secular regime. After initial setbacks, LIFG established close ties with Al Qaeda and other international *jihadi* organizations<sup>83</sup>—ensuring essential sources of training, finance, and sanctuary. With Qaddafi's popularity waning, LIFG put its efforts into training, so that it would be prepared once an opportunity arose to seriously challenge Qaddafi's rule. In 2011, as the "Arab Spring" swept across large portions of the Middle East and North Africa, Libyans *en masse* began to revolt against Qaddafi. Amid the revolution, LIFG founder Abdelhakim Belhaj and his LIFG fighters quickly rose through the ranks of the rebels to head the Tripoli Military Council within the burgeoning National Liberation Army.<sup>84</sup> By November, with significant support from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), LIFG and other anti-Qaddafi rebels had killed Qaddafi and successfully toppled the regime. Notably, the LIFG used network ties to bolster its durability, and its command-and-control structure that it set up prior to the Arab Spring proved a valuable arrangement once the revolt turned into a full-fledged revolutionary movement.

*Success by Sidestepping Asymmetry.* For non-state actors, the most promising path to success transpires when parity replaces asymmetry. Along this line, von Clausewitz noted a path to effective war fighting: "The more restricted the strength, the more restricted its goals must be; further, the more restricted the strength, the more limited the duration."<sup>85</sup> Among militant non-state actors, organizations that fight in their own weight-class—against other non-state actors—best depict those that take the advice of the Clausewitzian maxim. For example, in 1992, Los Perseguidos por Pablo Escobar (or Los Pepes) emerged with the limited vigilante goal of taking down Pablo Escobar and his Medellín Cartel. With access to U.S. intelligence and training from U.S. special operators, Los Pepes crushed Escobar's organization. Whereas the Policía Nacional de Colombia's Bloque de Búsqueda had for years gone after the "man on top of the mountain" to no avail, Los Pepes responded to local police wishes and went after the "mountain." Los Pepes terrorized Escobar's lawyers and supporters, destroyed his family's property, and assassinated "as many as three hundred [Medellín Cartel

members].”<sup>86</sup> Just over a year after its inception, Los Pepes contributed to the killing of Escobar, and disbanded shortly thereafter. The organization’s success, albeit modest relative to other examples of militant success, came fairly quickly and fulfilled the organization’s sole purpose.

*When Survival Becomes Success.* In rare circumstances, mere survival and maintenance of constituent support and alliances bring about outcome goal achievement without directly coercing or defeating the identified adversary. Hezb al-Da’awa al-Islamiyya (or Hezb al-Da’awa) represents a prime example of a violent political organization taking the narrow survival route to success. Hezb al-Da’awa was founded in 1957 with the goal of establishing a Shi’a-led Iraqi Islamic state. In its first few decades, its militant operations remained inconsistent, and the powerful and secular Ba’athi state overshadowed Hezb al-Da’awa’s political ambitions. In 1981, after finding a supporter in the new Iranian regime, Hezb al-Da’awa conducted its first suicide attack against the Iraqi embassy in Beirut, Lebanon in response to Iraq’s recent aggression against Shi’a.<sup>87</sup> In subsequent years, the organization would continue employing violence against Iraq on occasion in an attempt to strengthen its domestic Shi’a support base and retain Iranian support. During the U.S. War in Iraq, Hezb al-Da’awa made an effort to warm to the United States through American allies like the Iraqi National Congress, while staying close to Iran and its other Iraqi allies such as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. When the dust had settled, Hezb al-Da’awa had successfully outlasted Saddam Hussein, and helped to fill the political void after the United States eliminated the Ba’athi regime. In 2006, Secretary-General of Hezb al-Da’awa, Nouri al-Maliki, became Iraq’s first prime minister and head of government since transition. Hezb al-Da’awa used violence, and suicide attacks in particular, to buttress its support base yet refrained from using violence once it began to evoke a stronger response from the Ba’athi state. Importantly, Hezb al-Da’awa made alliances with states and non-states alike, and at critical points the organization expanded its state affiliations.

Militant success may be difficult to achieve, but it is not impossible. The cases of the ANC, LIFG, Los Pepes, and Hezb al-Da’awa exemplify the four main pathways to success that militant organizations have taken in the contemporary era. Although varying in degree, success entailed striking a balance between fulfilling the tactical wishes of supporters, effectively addressing the target, and avoiding or minimizing tradeoffs. Moreover, the case examples reiterate that making numerous and diverse allies—perhaps more than anything else—aids militant organizations in achieving their respective aims.

## Conclusion

Militant organizations succeed in achieving their outcome goals by eliminating, outlasting, or coercing their adversaries. Much of the extant political violence literature overemphasizes the coercive bargaining pathway to success. In asymmetric conflicts, only the adversary holds the power to make militant organizations successful. Gaining concessions then marks the most visible avenue for militants to achieve their outcome goals under truly asymmetric circumstances. Yet, concessions only lead to *partial* success, considering target states and populations have no incentive to submit to all of a militant organization’s demands and grant it complete success in exchange for ending violence. This is especially the case when such a concession might mean the end of the target state or necessitates making a major alteration of its way-of-life or borders. Due to very essence of bargaining, one side cannot completely achieve its outcome goal once a bargain takes place.

In order to achieve outcome goals *completely*, militant organizations necessarily avoid the *bargaining trap* and seek outright victories over their enemies or at a minimum to resist and outlast their adversaries. In pursuit of complete success, many militant organizations circumvent the bargaining route that precludes complete victory. Instead, they aim to overrun and annihilate their enemies by overcoming asymmetry with high levels of external support or sidestepping asymmetry from the onset.

While militant success remains difficult to achieve, militant organizations pursue outcome goals with greater or lesser odds of success depending on their operating conditions. Receptiveness to tradeoffs, levels of external support, and the nature of their adversaries shape the operative conditions of militant organizations, restricting or enriching efforts to survive and succeed. To accomplish outcome goals, militant organizations unavoidably balance between sustaining support and advancing against the opponent. Tradeoffs like the use of suicide attacks, although useful for reinforcing constituent support or making network connections, tend to bolster target resolve, invite intensified military responses, and thus decrease the likelihood of outcome goal achievement.

Establishing numerous and diverse alliances unlocks a wider range of resources, making for a unique form of capacity that strengthens organizational survivability and prospects for success. The dual contribution of network ties to survival and success showcases the vital role that fellow violent non-state actors play in the endeavors of militant organizations. Organizations such as Al Qaeda, AQI, and Tehrik e-Taliban maintain a variety of network ties, and as a result boost their durability substantially. Nevertheless, the traditional source of militant support—from state sponsors—continues to have a greater impact in turning already durable militant organizations into successful militant organizations.

State sponsorship remains essential to militant success. As noted above, militant organizations do not achieve most of their successes through political bargaining but rather from achieving outright victory. Defeating an opponent outright requires a significant amount of military or political aid, which removes the asymmetry of conflict in one way or another and makes the adversary vulnerable to military or political defeat. Whether regarding military support as with NATO's alliance with Libyan rebels, covert support like U.S. special operators training anti-cartel forces in Colombia, political support as many provided the ANC in its bid to topple the South African government, or more traditional forms of sponsorship as with Iran's relationship with Hezb al-Da'awa in Iraq, state supporters are nearly always involved when militant organizations succeed in completely achieving their outcome goals.

Although militant organizations may target democracies more often than not, democracies are more effective in stymieing militant achievement. Democracies rarely lose ground to militant organizations. More frequently, militants succeed when they take on other non-state actors, enlist international support to topple tyrannical regimes, or replace non-democratic governments once free elections are institutionalized.

The high rate of failure among militant organizations usually stems from a lack of foresight to craft a plausible pathway to victory against formidable adversaries, falling short in striking the right balance between opposing aims, and/or putting too much faith in coercive bargaining when they need to focus on rallying external supporters to directly join their conflicts and help defeat their adversaries outright. In efforts to enhance their operating conditions, militant organizations have few maneuvers that they can make with respect to their attributes and even fewer vis-à-vis their adversaries. Save for selecting weaker adversaries (if possible), heightening mobilization levels, and refraining from paradoxical tactics, militant organizations necessarily look to external support to improve their positions. Network ties serve to reduce the asymmetry of conflict, fostering survivability and raising the odds of success. State sponsors lend international credibility to militant organizations,

apply pressure on their adversaries, or fight alongside militants, all of which greatly increase potential for success. In the end, differences in the operating conditions of adversary type, external support structure, and receptiveness to tradeoffs explain why many militant organizations survive for long periods of time yet only a few achieve the goals that justify their existence.

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15. This resembles Putnam's "two-level games" analysis of international bargaining, wherein states necessarily seek to strike a balance between demands of international negotiating partners and the domestic constituency. See Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42(3) (1988), pp. 427–460.
16. Although well embedded in the security and conflict studies lexicon, traditional categories do not advance the focused analysis of the duration and effectiveness of violent political organizations. Similarly, the distinction between "domestic" and "international" organizations provides little theoretical insight with respect to a general analysis of militant outcomes. See Max Abrahms, "Why Democracies Make Superior Counterterrorists," *Security Studies* 16(2) (2007), p. 231. Salehyan makes a related argument regarding rebels that blur the line between inter- and intrastate conflicts. See Idean Salehyan, "No Shelter Here: Rebel Sanctuaries and International Conflict," *The Journal of Politics* 70(1) (2008), pp. 54–66.
17. By moving away from nominal categorical boundaries that are more likely to lead to the construction of incomplete samples, and taking up a more generalized conceptualization of militant organizations, one can alleviate the potential for a specific type of selection bias—"selection by researcher"—that often goes unnoticed in comparative studies. See Simon Hug, "Selection Bias in Comparative Research: The Case of Incomplete Data Sets," *Political Analysis* 11(3) (2003), pp. 255–274.
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31. Byman, *Deadly Connections*, pp. 53–78; and Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, pp. 258–263.
32. Byman, *Deadly Connections*, pp. 61–62 and 73–75.
33. Benjamin Acosta and Steven J. Childs, “Illuminating the Global Suicide-Attack Network,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 36(1) (2013), pp. 49–76.
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35. Brian J. Phillips, “Terrorist Group Cooperation and Longevity,” *International Studies Quarterly*, forthcoming.
36. Michael Radu and Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Latin American Revolutionaries: Groups, Goals, Methods* (New York: Pergamon-Brassey’s International Defense Publishers, 1990).
37. Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, pp. 110–113.
38. Benjamin Acosta, “The Suicide Bomber as Sunni-Shi’i Hybrid,” *Middle East Quarterly* 17(3) (2010), p. 18.
39. Organizations without any network ties are removed from the visualization in Figure 1, but remain in the data analysis.
40. Putnam, “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics,” p. 460.
41. A “suicide attack” refers to an act of political violence that initiates with the attempted—and usually successful—suicide of its perpetrator. I use the terms “martyrdom operation” and “suicide attack” interchangeably. The term “suicide terrorism” signifies suicide attacks that target civilians.
42. On 8 October 1980, Bassidj member Muhammad Hussein Fahmideh became the first contemporary suicide bomber.
43. Hoffman and McCormick, “Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack,” pp. 243–281; and Di-pak Gupta and Kusum Mundra, “Suicide Bombing as a Strategic Weapon: An Empirical Investigation of Hamas and Islamic Jihad,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17(4) (2005), p. 591.
44. Ami Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2005), p. 51.
45. Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, p. 20.
46. Ibid., pp. 78–81.
47. Along these lines, Moghadam makes an extensive argument about a fundamental difference between the employment of suicide attacks in “localized” versus “globalized” conflicts. See Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp. 38–61; and Assaf Moghadam, “Motives for Martyrdom: Al Qaida, Salafi Jihad, and the Spread of Suicide Attacks,” *International Security* 33(3) (2009), pp. 71–76.
48. Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom*, pp. 193–221; and Michael C. Horowitz, “Nonstate Actors and the Diffusion of Innovations: The Case of Suicide Terrorism,” *International Organization* 64(1) (2010), p. 54.

49. Acosta and Childs, "Illuminating the Global Suicide-Attack Network," pp. 68–69.
50. Nir Rosen, *In the Belly of the Green Bird: The Triumph of the Martyrs in Iraq* (New York: Free Press, 2006), pp. 174–194.
51. Mohammed Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute for Peace Press, 2007), pp. 106–110.
52. While Pape argues that the use of suicide attacks mostly brings organizational "success," Cronin and Abrahms demonstrate the tactic's ineffectiveness in achieving outcome goals. See Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism"; Pape, *Dying to Win*; Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*, pp. 66–67; and Max Abrahms, "Dying for Nothing? The Political Ineffectiveness of Suicide Terrorism," in Stuart Gottlieb, ed., *Debating Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Conflicting Perspectives on Causes, Contexts, and Responses* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 2010). Additionally, Ashworth et al. point out that Pape's research design selects on the dependent variable, biasing his sample and rendering his inferences unfounded empirically. See Scott Ashworth, Joshua D. Clinton, Adam Meirowitz, and Kristopher W. Ramsay, "Design, Inference, and the Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *American Political Science Review* 102(2) (2008), pp. 269–273. Using an unbiased sample, Horowitz shows that Pape's essential variable of national self-determination fails to significantly predict the organizational adoption of suicide attacks—muting Pape's claims about the supposed motivation and effectiveness driving the tactic's employment. See Horowitz, "Nonstate Actors and the Diffusion of Innovations," pp. 33–64.
53. Geraint Hughes, "The Insurgencies in Iraq, 2003–2009: Origins, Developments, Prospects," *Defence Studies* 10(1–2) (2010), pp. 152–176.
54. Hezbollah shares the role of chief representative of Lebanon's Shi'a population with Amal, which actually garners more votes than Hezbollah in national elections.
55. Schanzer, *Hamas vs. Fatah*, pp. 192–196.
56. The civil war literature notes that a fundamental problem resides with both sides of an armed conflict to make credible commitments to negotiate the end of hostilities. See Barbara F. Walter, "The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement," *International Organization* 51(3) (1997), pp. 335–364; and James D. Fearon, "Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer Than Others?" *Journal of Peace Research* 41(3) (2004), pp. 275–301.
57. Max Abrahms, "The Credibility Paradox: Violence as a Doubled-Edged Sword in International Politics," *International Studies Quarterly*, 57(4) (2013), p. 660.
58. Gupta and Mundra, "Suicide Bombing as a Strategic Weapon," p. 590.
59. Abrahms, "Why Terrorism Does Not Work," pp. 56–75; and Abrahms, "The Political Effectiveness of Terrorism Revisited," p. 382.
60. Seymour Spilerman and Guy Stecklov, "Societal Responses to Terrorist Attacks," *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (1999), pp. 167–189; Jennifer L. Merolla and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister, *Democracy at Risk: How Terrorist Threats Affect the Public* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); and Abrahms, "Dying for Nothing?" pp. 150–154.
61. Militants frequently use provocation strategies to galvanize popular support. See Hoffman and McCormick, "Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack," p. 246; Kydd and Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," pp. 69–72; and McCormick and Frank Giordano, "Things Come Together," pp. 308–311.
62. In asymmetric contexts, using extreme violence to deter a target from taking belligerent action is usually an easier task than compelling a target to make a conciliatory act. See Thomas C. Schelling, "What Purposes Can 'International Terrorism' Serve?" In Raymond G. Frey and Christopher W. Morris, eds., *Violence, Terrorism, and Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 18–32.
63. Crenshaw notes: "[Militants] seek either radical change in the status quo, which would confer a new advantage, or the defense of privileges they perceive to be threatened." Crenshaw, "The Logic of Terrorism," p. 10.
64. This follows Steedly and Foley, "The Success of Protest Groups," pp. 9–14; Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*, pp. 9, 72–73, and 249; and Abrahms, "The Political Effectiveness of Terrorism Revisited," p. 371.

65. See Lee Ann Banaszak, *Why Movements Succeed or Fail: Opportunity, Culture, and the Struggle for Woman Suffrage* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*, pp. 30–82; and Abrahms, “The Political Effectiveness of Terrorism Revisited,” pp. 378–382.

66. The full dataset is available at [www.benjaminacosta.com](http://www.benjaminacosta.com).

67. In coding state sponsorship, I employ Byman’s definition as criteria: “a government’s *intentional assistance* to a [militant] organization to help it use violence, bolster its political activities, or sustain the organization.” Byman, *Deadly Connections*, p. 10, (emphasis in original).

68. I define a *network tie* as a declared formal alliance, affiliation, or partnership between two organizations. Co-sponsored attacks demonstrate a network connection as well, as do other documented forms of collaboration. Network ties are also identified through “conduits,” or the identification of individual operatives that link together two or more militant organizations.

69. Sources include: the Institute for the Study of Violent Groups, “Violent Extremism Knowledge Base,” available at [www.isvg.org](http://www.isvg.org) (accessed 1 May 2013); the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), “Terrorist Groups,” available at [www.nctc.gov/site/groups/index.html](http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/index.html) (accessed 1 May 2013); NCTC, “Terrorist Profiles,” available at [www.nctc.gov/site/profiles/index.html](http://www.nctc.gov/site/profiles/index.html) (accessed 1 May 2013); Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism, “Terrorist Organization Profiles,” available at [www.start.umd.edu/start/data%5Fcollections/tops/](http://www.start.umd.edu/start/data%5Fcollections/tops/) (accessed 1 May 2013); Radu and Tismaneanu, *Latin American Revolutionaries*; Harvey W. Kushner, *Encyclopedia of Terrorism* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003); Byman, *Deadly Connections*; Ely Karmon, *Coalitions between Terrorist Organizations: Revolutionaries, Nationalists and Islamists* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 2005); Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*; and Salehyan, Gleditsch, and Cunningham, “Explaining External Support for Insurgent Groups.”

70. The GTD data was cross-referenced with data from RAND Corporation’s Database of World Terrorism Incidents (DWTI). For organizations not documented in GTD, I used DWTI data. The data on suicide attacks is from my original dataset, which is available online at [www.sandatabase.org](http://www.sandatabase.org). It was cross-referenced with the data from GTD. Specific attacks found in my dataset that were not present in GTD were tallied and added to the total attack counts of given organizations.

71. Jones and Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End*, pp. 142–185.

72. In some instances, GTD divides an organization’s attacks by the different names it utilizes. In such cases, I combined the attack profiles and analyzed attack entries line by line to ensure no overlap and double counting. I treat umbrella organizations as distinct entities apart from the comprising groups. Although clearly sharing members with their composite groups, umbrella organizations represent a separate entity altogether—which tend to have their own set of objectives and purpose.

73. For the empirical models, I converted Polity IV’s –10 to 10 scale to a fully positive scale by adding 10.

74. I measure per capita gross domestic product in thousands of U.S. dollars.

75. As in other survival analyses on militant organizations, the mean duration contrasts with Rapoport’s oft-cited guesstimate that “Perhaps as many as 90 percent [of militant organizations] last for less than a year.” David C. Rapoport, “Terrorism,” in Mary Hawkesworth and Maurice Kogan, eds., *Encyclopedia of Government and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 1067; see also Price, “Targeting Top Terrorists,” pp. 36–37.

76. This practice follows Fazal. See Tanisha M. Fazal, “State Death in the International System,” *International Organization* 58(2) (2004), p. 328.

77. Multiple tests confirm that the proportional hazards assumption holds.

78. See Martha Crenshaw, “How Terrorism Declines,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3(1) (1991), pp. 69–87; Rapoport, “Terrorism,” pp. 1061–1079; and Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, p. 242.

79. For the logit models, I present coefficients and robust standard errors.

80. Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, p. 20.

81. Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd edition (Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley, 1999), p. 177.

82. Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*, pp. 85–89.

83. Thomas Hegghammer, "The Ideological Hybridization of Jihadi Groups," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 9 (2009), pp. 33–34.
84. Lee Ferran and Rym Momtaz, "From Terror Group Founder to Libyan Rebel Military Commander," *ABC News* (29 August 2011). Available at <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/terror-group-founder-libyan-rebel-military-commander/story?id=14405319#.T8rY1464JSU> (accessed 2 July 2012).
85. von Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 283.
86. Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw* (New York: Penguin, 2001), p. 263.
87. Ned Parker and Raheem Salman, "Notes from the Underground: The Rise of Nouri al-Maliki and the New Islamists," *World Policy Journal* 30 (2013), pp. 63–76.